

NEW YORK POST
22 March 1985ARTICLE APPEARED
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CAP: WE DON'T KNOW SIZE OF RED ARSENAL

Defense Dept. drawing shows a Soviet SS20 missile attached to the rear end of train.

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WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger says the Pentagon is uncertain of how many warheads the Soviet Union has in its nuclear arsenal.

The startling admission could have staggering implications for the arms control negotiations in Geneva.

In a letter to Sen. James McClure (R-Idaho), Weinberger admitted that the Soviet missile inventory may be much greater than initially believed.

The letter said there is a "range of uncertainty" in U.S. intelligence estimates of the size of the Soviet nuclear arsenal.

This comes at a time of heightened concern in the Defense Dept. and intelligence agencies over the Kremlin's development of new, mobile MX-type missiles and the upgrading of existing missile systems.

Some defense experts now believe that the Soviet Union has an overwhelming 4-1 advantage over the U.S. in nuclear warheads.

During the debate over the MX missile last week, several senators were given secret intelligence briefings about the improvements in the Soviet ICBM strategic systems.

In those briefings, senators were shown charts taken from the Defense Intelligence Agency that indicated that the Soviet warhead count could be 8500 — and not the 6500 that the Pentagon plans to quote next month to the public in its report on Soviet military power.

Defense experts say this means that Wein-

berger's "range of uncertainty" could be 2200 ICBM warheads — 100 more than the entire U.S. nuclear warhead inventory.

The "gap" in the estimates appears to have stemmed from secret information obtained by the DIA revealing that:

● The Soviet Union is deploying 14 high-megaton warheads on their MX-type SS-18 missiles rather than 10 — as initially believed — which means there are 1232 extra nuclear warheads that can be fired at the U.S. from 308 SS-18 missile launchers.

● The Soviets already have deployed 100 mobile SS-25 missiles. An additional 50 10-warhead SS-24 missiles will be deployed on trains.

● The Soviets have a "reload capability" in their SS-17 and SS-18 missile force, despite strict SALT II prohibitions, giving the Soviets the ability to fire literally hundreds of extra warheads at the U.S.

Weinberger said that the Soviets now have 40 percent more ICBM missile-launchers than the U.S.